

NATURESCAPE: Definition & Proposal

By Jack Tooley
Parks & Recreation Commission
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A *Naturescape* park is designed with the intent of bringing children and people back to nature. It should be in as natural a state as possible using native plants, trees, fallen logs, rolling hills, rocks and sand using few manmade components. Children are able to be creative and imaginative while interacting with the natural world.

Naturescapes offer unstructured and open-ended play options that let children be creative and use their imagination. They offer a wide range of important developmental benefits for children.

Naturescapes are designed to minimize fall heights, the major cause of playground accidents. They have rolling hills, boulders, balancing logs rather than monkey bars and plastic slides.

A natural play space offers children a chance to escape from keyboards, TV and “keep ‘em busy” schedules. Instead, they are able to explore in a natural setting and play in/on sand, dirt, logs, and living plants.

Proposal for a Naturescape

Today, our children are seldom outside on their own. When they are, conventional playgrounds with plastic slides and metal pipe structures provide no experience with nature.

A Naturescape, on the other hand, offers children an opportunity to escape from TV, electronic games and keyboards and play in a natural setting with natural components and features—logs, boulders, mounds, sand, paths, trees, and shrubs. A chance to connect with nature. Naturescapes are open-ended spaces that encourage children to use their imagination, curiosity, and creativity in play.

Naturescapes blend natural materials, features, and indigenous vegetation with creative landforms to create a complex of environmental objects in ways that challenge and fascinate children—teaching them about the wonders and intricacies of the natural world while they play within it. Children who have the opportunity to play in natural surroundings stay mentally and physically engaged for longer periods of than on standard playgrounds and show more advanced motor fitness—including coordination, balance and agility.

Such a site can provide an important community based demonstration of environmental awareness and stewardship that children can carry with them as an adult.

For senior citizens and handicapped adults, the Naturescape is in-town, accessible by foot or bicycle, providing a peaceful site for rest and meditation. Exposure to nature even in a small, urban preserve benefits all of our citizens—young and old.

To develop a proposal for the Naturescape to be presented to the Park & Recreation Commission and ultimately to the City Council, the committee needs to frame the process and actions necessary for the project.

Steps necessary to develop the Naturescape proposal:

- Define a naturescape and its purpose
- Identify likely users
- List benefits to the community
- Identify potential sites
- Develop a conceptual plan of the park
- Submit draft proposal to PARC
- Find and hire an appropriate designer
- Review designer’s preliminary plan and budget
- Obtain public input-neighborhood and citywide
- Review/amend preliminary plan and budget
- Finalize a detailed plan and budget
- Submit to City Council
- Develop a maintenance plan and budget
- Plan a Grand Opening involving interested parties/community

Public real estate in Los Altos is extremely limited. We have looked at three possible Naturescape sites in North and Central Los Altos; redwood Grove, Hetch-Hetchy Strip and Mckenzie park. Each site has positive and negative aspects.

	<u>Redwood Grove</u>	<u>Hetch-Hetchy</u>	<u>MacKenzie</u>
Location	North LA	North LA	Central LA
Accessibility	Walk-In	Walk-In	Parking
Naturalness	Good	Good	Fair
Existing Play Area	Shoup	No	Yes-2 on site
Solitude	Good	Good	Fair
School Proximity	No	Santa Rita	Loyola
Parking	Street	Street	Parking Lot
Restrooms	Yes	No	Yes
Water	Close	Close	Yes
Need/Priority	Some	Great	Some